843 remove the blood. The Thongas think that, as the menses are suspended, the blood accumulates in the body and must be taken away.

Pregnancy is not considered as a tabooed period. As we have just seen, sexual relations are allowed during that time, even recommended as favourable to the growth of the child. However, in view of the impending birth, some special taboos have been added to those which apply to all women.

A pregnant woman *must not drink water when standing up*. She must kneel down, otherwise the water would fall violently on the head of the child and hurt it!

843 It is taboo for her to *wrap her body* in too much clothing.
845 She must keep her belly bare and never throw her dress (kapulane) over her shoulders, lest the baby come to the light with its head covered with membranes, a complication which is very much dreaded by Thonga women.

She must not take *the sauce* of her porridge *too hot*. The child might be scalded inside and have black spots when born.

It is also taboo to *prepare the ntche before the birth*, as no one knows what will happen. The child might die!

843 The future mother must not eat *pigeon's meat*, because pigeons
825 have no blood in the muscles of their breast. She would have no milk herself wherewith to nurse the baby. Nor must she even *look at a monkey*, lest she "take to herself" (tekela) the form of the animal and the child be like it!

A woman, in the beginning of pregnancy, must not visit a sick person. The latter might die.

843 As regards women dying during pregnancy, see page 166.

766 *Miscarriages* are very much feared amongst South Africans,
731 not for themselves, but because they are accompanied by an
789 uncontrolled effusion of a blood which is a terrible taboo. The
826 discharged foetus must be buried in wet soil, otherwise the rain will not fall: the country having been polluted will be dried up by hot winds. A strange rite called *mbelele* is performed in times of drought, when all the graves of children born prematurely and buried on the hill are searched, and their contents thrown into the mud, near the river. We shall discuss in Part VI the

C. SUNDRY COURT CUSTOMS

644 The paraphernalia of royalty are very modest in the Thonga courts. However there are some to be mentioned in addition to the regalia which I have described.

1. *The Big Drum* (Muntshintshi).

644 534 237 This is found in every capital, even sometimes in the sub-chief's villages. It is made of a hollowed-stem, somewhat like an ordinary mortar; or it may be rounded, and even provided with three legs, as in Nondwane; a piece of skin is stretched over the opening. This may be the skin of an elephant's ear, of a buffalo, of an ox or of an antelope *mangulwe*. This instrument is subject to some taboos; when the skin cracks, it is forbidden to look inside. There is something mysterious about it and nobody must disclose that mystery. People say that a bullet is introduced into it when it is made. In Shiluvane they asserted that the skull of the hostile chief, Sikororo, killed in the battle of Nov. 1901, had been put into the big drum! At any rate, there is a special individual who is summoned to repair it and he receives a fowl as reward.

644 534 731 202 The big drum is beaten on various occasions:

a) To announce a great fatality, especially the death of a chief, or the day of the publication of the mourning; also the approach of the inundation, when the Nkomati river rises, in January or February, and threatens to cover the whole land; again when the bush fire threatens to destroy the capital.

b) To summon warriors to the capital in case of imminent war.

644 534 c) To execute various musical performances. The big drum leads a special dance (nkino), which takes place at the capital during the winter, when the harvest is ended, and the country happy and prosperous. It is accompanied by a smaller drum (shikolombane) which is called the "son" of the big one. The

rite may explain why sexual relations are prohibited during all important hunting and fishing operations. With their magic conception of Nature, Bantus do not separate the domain of man from the animal world ; human actions have their immediate effect amongst animals. So if men and women keep strict control over themselves, hippopotami, fish or elephants will not be so wild, and hunters will have more success!

* * *

Meat is either boiled (pseka), or roasted (wosha). When boiled, the broth is called *muru*, (Ro.) or *sheshebo*, (Dj.) the same name that is given to monkey nut sauce or any other seasoning. When roasted, it is either placed on the embers, or skewered on sticks (lihanga) and exposed to the heat of the fire.

The blood of animals (bubendje) is also eaten by most men. However, many fear it (tshaba), not on account of a yila, as if it were taboo, but rather from individual loathing. There are no special laws to be observed as regards bones. The meat of sacrifices, offered in the funeral rites, must be eaten *on the road*, not in the mortuary nor in the guests' villages, as we have already seen.

Meat is welcome, and eagerly sought after in time of famine (ndlala). Should the October rains fail, or the crops be destroyed by grasshoppers, as has been, alas, frequently the case since the first appearance of these pests in August 1894 (1), the Natives are bereft of every resource (2). They dig up all the edges of the

(1) Just at the commencement of the war between the Natives and the Portuguese, grasshoppers arrived in thick clouds in the district of Lourenço Marques. They had not been seen for a great number of years : old folk only recollected having seen them in bygone times. Since then the scourge has never entirely disappeared. The coincidence of their coming and the beginning of hostilities struck the Blacks very forcibly ; they often said, at the sight of the grasshoppers : "They announce the armies of Gunguyana."

(2) Here is a pretty couplet with reference to famine :

Nkondjo wa nhlengana shipopokwana ?

— Lembe ra ndlala a he ngume kusuhe !

The traces of the little antelope (nhlengana) (which one sees in the desert a long way from its lair) recall the year of famine, when one does not stay near home ; (one must go a long way to search for food). See also the several allusions to the year of famine in *Les Chants et Contes des Ba-Ronga*, p. 158, 160 et seq.

262 lakes, to find the tubers of the nenuphars (Nymphea stellata), and
731 cook these indigestible roots (matibu). They have also gone so far as to make flour of the pith of the palm trees (mimale). They disinter the bodies of dead animals, or cram themselves with *masala*, which often engenders serious vomiting. Some eat big Copris beetles.

Such famines were frequent in former times, and special years are still known as having been years of *ndlala*. So, in the chronology of Shinangana (Part IV) the year 1875 (?) was called "the year of the Magadingele famine." On the Coast the Goñhwen famine is still remembered (1). The proximity of a seaport which is easily provisioned, and the possibility of earning money wherewith to buy rice and maize constitute a real advantage which Natives are the first to recognise. In this respect civilisation has rendered signal service to the Thonga commissariat!

266 (1) It does not appear that starvation ever induced Thongas to practise cannibalism on any considerable scale. Cases are known of this happening as when, during the war of 1895, a Ronga killed a man and ate his lungs and kidneys quite raw. He was prosecuted and deported to Mozambique. In the mountains, the Ba-Pedi and Ba-Sutho began to consume human flesh after the raids of Chaka and his generals. They first ate the corpses; then, having acquired a taste for this food, they began to attack travellers, springing out from the caves in the mountains, where they were hiding; they even made organised expeditions in search of men to devour. These cannibals are known by the name of Makhema and caused the Queen of the Bokhaha, Male, to change her residence (l. p. 477).

reach heaven. The magician, seeing the thunderstorm approaching, climbs up the hill without any fear, blows in his flute: psee... psee... psee..., and shouts: "You! Heaven! Go further! I have nothing against you! I do not fight against you!" He may add in a threatening tone: "If you are sent by my enemies against me, I will cut you open with this knife of mine." The thunderstorm will then pass away!

This invocation to Heaven is curious, and we shall better understand it when studying the part played by Heaven in Thonga religion. Here I am merely considering the superstition as an attempt at explaining a natural phenomenon. And we may well ask: how is it possible for such absurdities to be believed, and firmly believed, by men who are not at all devoid of a sense of observation? The idea that lightning is a bird comes perhaps from the fact that its movements in falling from above resemble the evolutions of a bird in the air. After all the phenomenon is so sudden that this explanation could easily be accepted by the imagination of the savage. As regards the statements about the coagulated urine of the bird, I must admit that I was unable to understand on what they could be based, until I saw some samples of fulgurites found where lightning had struck the ground; the heat of the electric current vitrifies the sand, forming a kind of pipe, which enters the soil, where it ramifies to a certain depth. These fulgurites, though not perfectly answering to the description given by Native magicians, may have been the natural substratum upon which Bantu imagination built up all the other superstitions.

5) The problem of rain and the way Thongas deal with it.

All over the earth the question of rainfall is of primary importance, but this is especially the case in Subtropical Africa, even more than anywhere else. Rain may not fall during seven months, from April to October, and nobody worries about it. But if it fails in November and December, at the beginning of the rainy season, it is a dreadful misfortune, a calamity more serious

than any other. The life of every individual, and consequently of the whole clan, is threatened. Famine will certainly follow, as cereals can only be sown during these two months and famine means not only suffering and anguish, but often death, in a primit.ve tribe which is totally ignorant of trade with out-lying countries, and does not possess any means of conveyance for food bought in other lands. No wonder therefore that the imagination of the South African Native has invented ways and means of regularising the rainfall, and that rites, and charms, and all the powers of magic have been resorted to with a view to ensuring the precious rain to the tribe at the right time.

These methods may be classified in two categories : the rites which aim at removing the causes which are believed to prevent rain and the charms by which the rain is made to fall, irrespective of any preventing cause.

a) *The causes which prevent rainfall and the rites by which they are removed.*

The general view is that rain comes *from the gods* : "Psikwembu psi nisa mpfula" — "the spirits of the ancestors cause rain to fall." So, should the spring showers not come in due time, the first idea will be to offer a sacrifice to the ancestor-gods, especially if the bones consulted have revealed that the anger of the gods is the real cause. Men will go to the sacred wood where the ancestors have been buried, sing there an ancient mourning song (I suppose No. 15, page 286, is used for the purpose), and some of them will beat the graves with sticks. As regards the sacrifice, it consists of a black victim, or it may even be the offering of a living human being to the gods ; these rites will be described later on.

Or it may be that a certain individual, *a wizard*, endowed with magical power, or rather possessing enchanted drugs, prevents the rain from falling (a siba mpfula) through wickedness, or hatred of his countrymen. This is a rarer occurrence.

But the terrible calamity of drought is brought into direct